

Nonstandard Work Schedules and Childcare Arrangements

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Abstract:

Nonstandard (NS) work schedules can be challenging for many American families especially those with children, as they must navigate relationships, housework, family time, and childcare (Presser 2004; Presser and Ward 2011). Additionally, NS schedules are not evenly distributed across families (Presser 2003). NS schedules shape parent childcare choice and the childcare arrangements that are accessible and available to families. It is important to understand what type of care families working NS hours use for their children (home-based, center-based, and relative care), as childcare impacts children's developmental outcomes. The type of care used by parents working NS hours has been found to differ based on family structure (single parent and two-partner households) and parent work stability and predictability.

Keywords: caregiver/provider | childcare and eldercare | policy advocate | researcher or teacher | children | workplace practitioner | employer policies & HR management | family dynamics and wellbeing | scheduling, leave, and flexible work

Article:

Introduction

Nonstandard (NS) work schedules can be challenging for many American families, especially those with children, as they navigate relationships, housework, family time, and childcare (Presser 2004; Presser and Ward, 2011). Understanding the impact of NS work schedules on childcare arrangements is critical, as 1 in 5 workers (20%) in the United States operates on a NS work schedule (Enchautegui 2013) and childcare during NS work hours is limited (Ros Pilarz, Lin, and Magnuson 2019). The occupations that workers with NS schedules typically occupy tend to be low-wage positions. Occupations that operate on NS schedules are often service sector positions and include jobs such as security officers, waiters, laborers,

nursing and health aids, and janitors. Industries that have the highest number of workers with NS schedules include lodging and food services, arts and entertainment, retail, and manufacturing (Enchautegui 2013).

NS work schedules are not evenly distributed across the labor market, with various characteristics influencing the chance of working a NS schedule, including age, ethnicity, family structure, immigration status, and education level (Enchautegui 2013; Presser 2003). Overall, NS schedule workers are more likely to be men, less educated, and those of minoritized populations, particularly low-income Asian, Black, and Latinx workers (Enchautegui 2013; Presser 2003). According to nationally representative data, NS work is heavily concentrated among low-income families and working parents.

Clearly, NS work schedules shape the childcare arrangements that are accessible and available to families. Childcare is critical for children's development and school success and helps working parents maintain jobs, reduce stress, and stabilize their employment. However, the challenge of finding and securing reliable quality childcare can often be costly, time consuming, and stressful. Given the childcare shortage during NS work hours (Presser 1989; Kimmel and Powell 2006), it is important to understand what type of care families working NS hours use for their children.

This entry highlights the relationship between NS work schedules and childcare in the United States. Because there is variation in work policies, childcare, and the prevalence of NS work schedules globally (Han 2007), we limit our focus to the United States to better elucidate the complex array of factors that impact childcare arrangements for NS workers in one national, industrialized context. Accordingly, we first define NS work schedules and the types and characteristics of childcare arrangements followed by why the topic is important to the field of work and family. Next, we provide an overview of the literature related to the topic of NS work and childcare in the United States, attending to variations in findings based on family structure and the stability and predictability (or lack thereof) in work schedules. Lastly, implications for workplace and childcare policy are provided.

Basic concepts and definitions

Nonstandard Work

Nonstandard (NS) work hours refer to work outside Monday to Friday daytime business hours, usually 9am-5pm, including weekend work. There are slight variations in the definition of what constitutes NS work hours, with some scholars using time ranges, while others define shifts (Ros Pilarz et al. 2019). Harriet B. Presser who conducted research focused on NS work for over 30 years, modified the U.S. Department of Labor definitions and consistently defined work schedules as the following (2003, 2004): a) Fixed day: At least half the hours worked most days fall between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., b) Fixed evening: At least half the hours worked most days fall between 4 p.m. and midnight, c) Fixed night: At least half the hours worked most days fall

between midnight and 8 a.m., d) Rotating: Schedule changes from days to evenings or nights, and e) Hours vary: An irregular schedule that cannot be classified in any of the above categories. According to Presser's categorization, NS schedules would include fixed evening, fixed night, rotating, and hours vary work schedules. More recently, scholars who study NS work hours in relation to childcare have defined NS schedules as work outside the traditional work week hours of 6am-6pm (Enchautegui 2013); others define NS work hours as those outside of 8am-6pm (Chaudry et al. 2011). Overall, NS work schedules involve the majority of work hours outside the standard daytime which can consequently impact a host of experiences and outcomes for NS workers and their families. For example, working NS schedules has been associated with physical and mental health, marital quality, the division of housework, and childcare arrangements (Enchautegui 2013; Presser 2004).

Childcare Arrangements

Families use a variety of arrangements to ensure care for their young children, and different definitions of childcare arrangements exist in the literature. For this entry, childcare arrangements are defined to include four types of care: center based, home based, relative care, and parental care. Center based care refers to childcare arrangements in which children are in group settings that likely provides a curriculum. These arrangements include childcare centers, public prekindergarten programs, and Head Start centers (Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012). Home based care includes paid or unpaid care for a child in a home setting and usually refers to a family childcare provider, friend, neighbor, or nanny. Relative care is when a family member, most often a grandmother, aunt, or sibling, cares for young children. Lastly, parental care is when a parent, either mother or father, cares for their child (Sandstrom and Chaudry 2012).

Additionally, characteristics of childcare arrangements such as the complexity and continuity of care are crucial to understand. Care complexity refers to the number of care arrangements that families may use to adequately cover their childcare needs. High care complexity refers to the use of multiple childcare arrangements with parents needing several caregivers, leading to a more complicated arrangement of care for children (Hepburn 2018). Care continuity refers to how long children stay with a certain caregiver within an arrangement. Low care continuity means that children change arrangements frequently and do not stay in care arrangements for long periods of time (Hepburn 2018).

In relation to school readiness outcomes, the types and characteristics of childcare are important as they have been associated with various child outcomes. School readiness is broadly defined as children's transition skills, competence, and capacity for learning across different developmental domains before entering a formal school setting (Britto, 2012). School readiness is a multidimensional construct with five dimensions: (a) early language development, (b) physical well-being and motor development, (c) social and emotional development, (d) approaches to learning and (e) general knowledge (Child Trends 2015). The knowledge and

skills gained in childcare before entering kindergarten are foundational for later development and affect children's future educational and behavioral trajectories (Britto 2012).

Engagement in center based care has been linked to cognitive and academic gains but also increased behavioral problems (Hepburn 2018). Home based and relative care has been linked to lower school readiness outcomes but has been found to be more stable in some cases, which is beneficial for children's attachment and behavioral outcomes (Carrillo et al. 2017). Care complexity has been linked to increased behavior problems and difficulties adjusting to school, however continuity of care regardless of care type has been shown to lower distress and behavior problems and increase school readiness outcomes and child well-being (Carrillo et al. 2017; Hepburn 2018). Because childcare arrangements impact children's outcomes, it is important to know the care arrangements that parents engaged in nonstandard work are utilizing.

Importance of topic to work and family studies

NS work schedules may impact parent, child, and overall family well-being and can pose challenges to managing both work and family demands. For example, in relation to parent wellbeing, working NS hours can impact physical and emotional energy, sleeping patterns, and disrupt relationship communication and family interaction (Hendrix 2016). Additionally, in relation to child well-being, parents who work NS schedules spend less time with their children compared to parents working standard hours (Enchautegui 2013). NS work schedules can impact parent involvement, limiting parents' availability to help with homework or attend school and extracurricular activities (Hendrix 2016). In turn, consequences of parents' NS work schedules for children may include behavioral, psychological, and educational challenges (Perez, 2019).

Navigating childcare for parents working NS schedules is a public health issue that is important for employers, childcare providers, and public policy makers to understand given the impact on a large sector of the labor force and the future success of the nation's youngest persons. Importantly, rates of NS work hours are high for dual-earner families with at least 60% of dual earner parents of young children comprised of at least one parent working NS hours (Ros Pilarz et al. 2019). Having preschool-age children also increases the odds of working NS hours among low-income women for a variety of reasons including the types of jobs available to low-income mothers with limited education, difficulty accessing affordable quality care during the day, the availability of no or low-cost relative care during NS hours, and mothers' preference to be primary caregivers to their young children during the day (Enchautegui 2013). Clearly, the relationship between NS work schedules and childcare arrangements is bidirectional and dynamic (Chaudry et al. 2010). Parents must work to provide for their children; however, parents need childcare in order to work and sustain financial stability. This duality is important to understand as both childcare and work must coincide to ensure parents have the ability to

provide for their families.

To summarize, the manner in which parents' NS work schedules and childcare arrangements unfold has important implications for the development of children. The type of childcare that children participate in during their first five years of life has been found to be associated with developmental outcomes, well-being, and preparation for formal schooling (Perez 2019). In relation to school readiness outcomes for children, research focused on the childcare arrangements of children of parents who work NS shifts provides a snapshot of children's early learning experiences and the types of care arrangements on which parents typically must rely. Additionally, there are consistent findings that low income and minoritized population children start school behind their higher income and White peers (Perez 2019; Rachidi et al. 2019). Given that NS working parents are more likely to be low income and minoritized, there is a clear need to recognize the ways in which work and childcare constraints contribute to inequities for families. Informed by the overarching goal of providing low-income children an optimal start to school, research on parents' NS work and childcare arrangements suggest a critical need for the field of work and family to address the accessibility of quality childcare for NS working families.

Body of Knowledge

Literature on NS work schedules and childcare was primarily conducted by the scholar Harriett Presser who used nationally representative data in the 1980s and 90s to better understand how employed mothers' work schedules affected their childcare decisions and management (1986, 1989, 2004). This early research focused on shift work of mothers and their childcare arrangements and concentrated on full time and part time employment of mothers (Presser 1986, 1989). Presser (1989) highlighted the lack of fit between nonparental and formal care arrangements and work schedules which is still an issue for parents working NS schedules today (Enchautegui 2013; Rachidi et al. 2019).

The majority of the research on NS work schedules and childcare is quantitative and uses large national datasets and census data to describe the types of childcare utilized and the characteristics of the NS working families who access childcare arrangements for their children (Enchautegui 2013, 2015; Hepburn 2018; Presser 1989). This literature has largely focused on family structure differences noting how single parents (read: mothers) and dual-earner couples navigate childcare arrangements. More recently, qualitative studies have captured the nuanced experiences of childcare decision making for NS working parents moving beyond family structure to emphasize the complexity and reasoning behind the childcare arrangements parents use (Carrillo et al. 2017; Chaudry et al. 2011). The review below is organized to note theoretical underpinnings and associations between NS work and childcare arrangements by family structure and the influence of work stability and predictability.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Contemporary research on parents' NS work schedules and childcare arrangements has been couched within a childcare decision-making model. Two theories that have been used to understand the associations between childcare choice and NS work schedules are the economic consumer choice theory and the accommodations model. The economic consumer choice theory suggests that choices are rational and fully informed based on individual preferences and budget constraints. The theory suggests that childcare and employment are jointly determined, and families choose employment and care arrangements that fit best given their finances and childcare prices (Chaudry, Henly, and Meyers 2010; Hepburn 2018). The accommodations model argues childcare decision making does not include fully informed or deeply reasoned choices nor are they individual 'choices.' Yet they are rather accommodations to multiple constraints, with parents choosing the best possible option given their circumstances (Chaudry et al. 2010; Meyers and Jordan 2006). Parents' use and selection of childcare arrangements are not only determined by the price of care but reflect a dynamic process of accommodations to family and employment demands, social and economic resources, cultural preferences and norms, as well as childcare markets (Meyers and Jordan 2006). Overall, both models highlight that parents' preferences inform their childcare decisions. However, practical features such as income and work schedules also shape parents' access and use of care.

Family Structure

Literature on NS work schedules and childcare for families with young children has largely focused on mothers and the influence of marital status on their work schedules and childcare arrangements (Enchautegui et al. 2015; Presser 1986, 1988).

Single parents. Studies have shown that for single parents, often solely focused on mothers, work schedules are strongly associated with childcare arrangements. In relation to mothers with standard schedules, mothers with NS schedules have complex childcare needs and often use multiple arrangements including center, relative, and parental care. It has been found that single mothers' arrangements are three times as complex as those in two-partner homes (Hepburn 2018). In terms of type of care, single mothers use relative care most frequently often relying on family support systems. Mothers working NS schedules are less likely to use home based or center-based care than standard schedule single mothers, as many single mothers work irregular hours and require care during both standard and NS hours. However, there are differences based on child age. When focused on mothers with infants and toddlers (0-2-year-old children), studies have found that the more NS hours mothers work, the less likely they enroll their children in center based care (Chaudry et al. 2011; Ros Pilarz et al. 2019). As children get older or if mothers also have a child who is preschool aged (3-5 years old), there is increased likelihood of using center based care (Chaudry et al. 2011; Kimmel and Powell 2006).

Additionally, childcare is less continuous for children in single mother households, with single NS schedule mothers searching more often for care than single mothers with standard

schedules and NS working two parent households (Hepburn 2018). Childcare is also complex for single parents as demonstrated in a study using nationally representative data highlighting that over half of single parents must use multiple care arrangements to cover all the hours they need, regardless of their income (Enchautegui et al. 2015).

Coupled parents. Partners are important sources of childcare for families working NS hours. About half of partnered NS working mothers rely on the other parent for childcare (Enchautegui et al. 2015; Presser 1988). Research shows that low-income married or partnered parents are more likely to work NS schedules than single parents in order to provide care for their children (Carrillo et al. 2017; Enchautegui et al. 2015). Studies have found that parents often tag team and take shifts, whether they are living together or not (Enchautegui et al. 2015). While partnered parents do rely on the other parent or their spouse, they still often need to secure other types of care and secondary care arrangements. A third of all NS working dual earner parents use relative care and rely on a family anchor, most often a grandmother (Carrillo et al. 2017; Kimmel and Powell 2006). More specifically, two studies using different nationally representative data found that couples who work NS hours do not use center or home based care often and use those types of arrangements less often than single parents who work NS schedules (Enchautegui et al. 2015). As for care complexity, two-thirds of couples working NS schedules do not have to manage multiple caregivers as children are most likely with a parent or a relative (Enchautegui et al. 2015; Hepburn 2018).

Work Stability and Predictability

More recently research has moved beyond family structure as a predictor of NS schedules and childcare arrangements and begun to focus on the stability and predictability of work hours. Studies find that NS schedule working parents rely almost exclusively on informal (parental and relative) care arrangements to handle unpredictable work schedules (Carrillo et al. 2017; Chaudry et al. 2011). Instability and change in NS work schedules are associated with instability in childcare arrangements and access to childcare subsidies (Rachidi et al. 2019). Notably, instability in care impacts children's behaviors, cognitions, and adjustment to school and can contribute to the formation of insecure attachments, child stress, and health problems.

A longitudinal study using the Fragile Families and Child Well-being data found that changing and irregular work schedules was common for mothers working NS hours. Mothers who worked both standard and NS schedules over a three-year period experienced the highest levels of instability in childcare arrangements in relation to mothers who worked only standard or only NS schedules. Additionally, mothers who worked NS and mothers that worked both NS and standard schedules had difficulty receiving childcare subsidies and were less likely to receive vouchers, given their fluctuating schedules (Rachidi et al. 2019).

One qualitative study (Carrillo et al. 2017) found that when it comes to stability and

predictability of work, more stable and predictable work schedules led to more stable care at home whether it involved parental tag team arrangements or care by family members. However, more unstable and unpredictable work schedules lead to challenges in meeting the demands of work or a childcare scramble. Although parents with unpredictable schedules rely heavily on parental and relative care overall to meet the demands of work, they are often burdened with the hassle of experiencing a childcare scramble, which is the need to arrange care at the last minute and on a weekly basis due to their changing work schedules. When unable to arrange care due to an unpredictable schedule, parents reported that they were unable to go to work on a given day because they simply could not find available childcare for the hours needed on short notice. Further, parents noted that they relied on various programs to manage childcare needs and would often feel overwhelmed trying to negotiate the timing and logistics of balancing their ever changing work schedules and childcare arrangements (Carrillo et al. 2017).

Qualitative studies further highlight that even if parents have access to relative care, they must navigate the schedules of relatives which may not be as reliable as they need. Decades of research show that it is a struggle for parents to arrange childcare around changing work schedules, and relatives' availability to provide care to cover unpredictable NS work schedules is limited (Chaudry et al. 2011). These findings suggest that the instability associated with working NS schedules that are often changing and/or unpredictable is what may cause difficulties for families in negotiating child care rather than simply the presence of NS work hours (Rachidi et al. 2019). While parents single or coupled heavily rely on parental and relative care to accommodate NS work schedules, recent research underscores the challenges of these arrangements due to a lack of stability and predictability of work hours that influence options for childcare and make it difficult for parents to use the care they prefer such as high quality center based care (Chaudry et al. 2011).

Implications for research and practice

Overall, research has shown that parents' NS work schedules may contribute negatively to parents' stress and well-being and require considerable negotiation and navigation related to childcare arrangements. Low income families will likely continue to work NS hours, given the 24/7 American economy. Thus, policies should reflect their realities and address the challenges NS working families face, specifically in relation to their childcare needs. Early childcare systems and workplace policies are two domains that could be altered to better support employees who work NS hours and their children.

Working NS schedules has been linked to the lower likelihood of center care enrollment due to both high cost and the limits of formal care arrangements that do not meet the scheduling needs of NS working parents. Early childcare system policymakers should consider policies that incentivize center providers to increase their hours to make childcare more accessible and accommodating for NS schedule parents. Some incentives could also include increased subsidy rates for providers and access to state grants for centers with extended hours. Expanding

availability of early morning, late afternoon, and evening care could help reduce dependence on relatives. However, given families use of relative care, there should be resources to provide subsidies and financial support for mothers to pay for in home childcare providers and informal means of care (Enchautegui 2013). The need to support expanded hour options for center based care is also important for the educational trajectories of young children. Thus, policies should aim to address how the care received in the first few years of life can have a lasting impact on children.

Additionally, limited childcare supports and alternatives during NS work hours is particularly detrimental to single, low income mothers who are overrepresented in NS jobs. In the absence of reliable, affordable, high-quality childcare during NS work hours, single mothers face challenges to finding and keeping their jobs. In turn, the labor market and the financial stability of millions of families is impacted. Some workplace policies that could be implemented at large scale companies who require frequent NS work schedules could include on-site childcare as well as on-site mental and physical health supports. These policies could address many of the stressors associated with working NS schedules for families. Another workplace policy that could help families navigate care arrangements would be the implementation of fair work scheduling to strengthen schedule control for low wage NS workers. Advanced scheduling could help parents plan for and access more center based care and increase stability and continuity in their childcare arrangements. Providing workers more schedule control has the potential to increase their hours worked and thus benefit both the employer and the employee, while also optimizing parents' access to more stable and affordable care arrangements (Perez 2019; Ros Pilarz et al. 2019).

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